Goodwill as Bad Faith

Unmasking Operation
Sadbhavana in Jammu & Kashmir

August 2025

KASHMIR
LAW & JUSTICE
PROJECT

Transforming Topa Pir

On December 22nd, 2023, nine men from the Topa Pir village of Poonch district, in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (IAJK), were arbitrarily detained by the Indian Army and taken to a nearby military camp for "questioning."[1,2] Three of these men never returned home – their bodies were discovered near the Line of Control (the cease-fire line between the Indian and Pakistani militaries that acts as a de facto border separating IAJK from Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir (PAJK)) with extensive evidence of torture during their custody.[3] Five of the other six men in custody were hospitalized with serious injuries from torture.[4] Lal Hussain, one of the men who survived, reported that soldiers beat him and the others for over five hours.[5] A video taken inside the military camp detailing the torture inflicted on the detained men was soon leaked.[6] The leaked video went viral, and, as the news spread throughout the district of Poonch, protestors publicly demanded justice for the victims and accountability for the Army's crimes.[7]

A month later, in January of 2024, the White Knight Corps of the Indian Army announced on X that they were "adopting Pir Topa as a model village" under Operation Sadbhavana

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1 Safwat Zargar, "'They Died in Front of My Eyes': Eyewitness Recounts Torture of Poonch Villagers in Army Custody." Scroll.In, December 31, 2023. https://scroll.in/article/1061399/they-died-in-front-of-my-eyes-eyewitness-recounts-torture-of-poonch-villagers-in-army-custody.

2 Though this report focuses on nine men from the Topa Pir village, their abuse was part of a wider torture case involving 26 men from across the Poonch district. For more information, see The Caravan reports here: https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/poonch-torture-army-generals; https://caravanmagazine.in/statement/press-council-of-india-betraying-freedom-of-press. Note that The Caravan's original article reporting on this case was ordered to be taken down by the Ministry of Information Broadcasting.
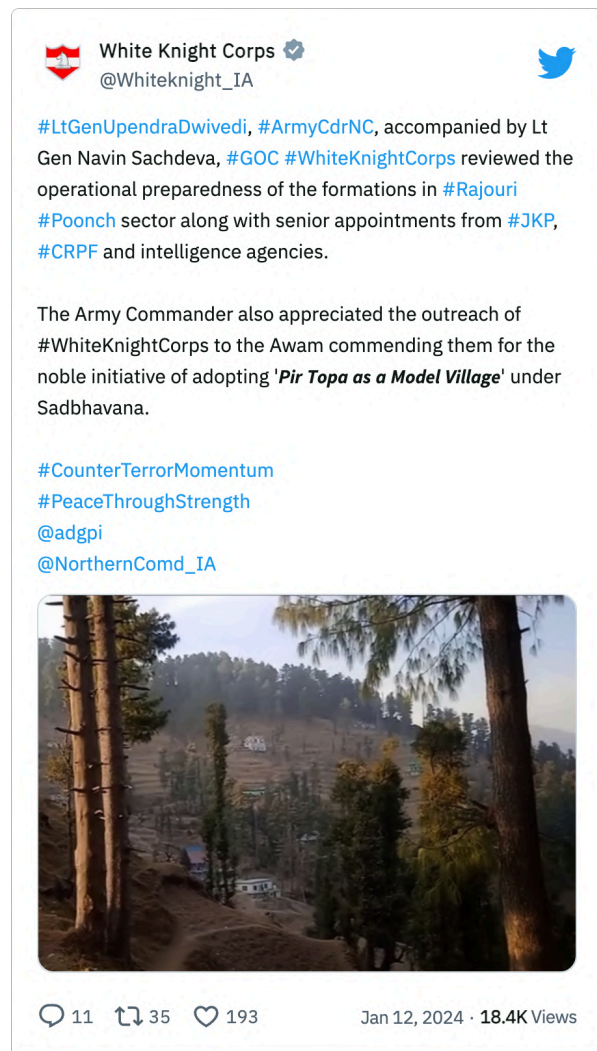
3 Sunidhi Das, "India Army Initiates Investigation into Death of Jammu and Kashmir Civilians," JURISTnews, December 27, 2023. https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/12/india-army-initiates-investigation-into-death-of-jammu-and-kashmir-civilians/.

4 Zargar, "'They Died in Front of My Eyes': Eyewitness Recounts Torture of Poonch Villagers in Army Custody."

5 Ibid.

6 Das, "India Army Initiates Investigation into Death of Jammu and Kashmir Civilians."

7 Ibid.

White Knight Corps ✔
@Whiteknight_IA

#LtGenUpendraDwivedi, #ArmyCdrNC, accompanied by Lt Gen Navin Sachdeva, #GOC #WhiteKnightCorps reviewed the operational preparedness of the formations in #Rajouri #Poonch sector along with senior appointments from #JKP, #CRPF and intelligence agencies.

The Army Commander also appreciated the outreach of #WhiteKnightCorps to the Awam commending them for the noble initiative of adopting '*Pir Topa as a Model Village*' under Sadbhavana.

#CounterTerrorMomentum
#PeaceThroughStrength
@adgpi
@NorthernComd_IA

💬 11   🔁 35   ♡ 193   Jan 12, 2024 · 18.4K Views

Post from the White Knight Corps' X account announcing the adoption of Topa Pir as a model village.

(Goodwill)[8]—an initiative of the Indian Army focused on "winning the hearts and minds" of the local populace through "humanitarian" and "development" programs.[9] The White Knight Corps, also known as the 16th Corps of the Indian Army, was established in 1972 and is one of three Indian Army Corps known to be operating in IAJK.[10] The White Knight

8 Suhail Nazeer Bhat, "Indian Army Adopts Pir Topa Village Of Jammu And Kashmir's Poonch After Death Of 3 Civilians." TimesNow, January 13, 2024. https://www.timesnownews.com/india/indian-army-adopts-pir-topa-village-of-jammu-and-kashmirs-poonch-after-death-of-3-civilians-article-106818975.

9 Asha Hans, "An Experiment in Transition from Military to Human Security," in The Gender Imperative: Human Security vs. State Security (Routledge, 2010), 394-95.

10 "Meet Indian Army's White Knight Corps Which Gunned down Three Terrorists," The Economic Times, October 29, 2024, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/meet-indian-armys-white-knight-corps-which-gunned-down-three-terrorists/

Corps claims to focus on counterinsurgency operations in the region.[11]

Since January 2024, the Indian Army has implemented a handful of Sadbhavana projects in Topa Pir. Some noteworthy examples include paving main roads, upgrading medical facilities and schools, increasing water availability, and generally "assisting villagers with their daily needs."[12] Indian media outlets soon hailed these efforts. For example, in September 2024, News 18 reported that "The efforts are inspiring the local youth to pursue higher goals, including preparation for state service exam… [T]here's a growing sense of civic engagement among residents."[13]

Topa Pir is a small village comprised of only 61 households and located right near the Line of Control.[14] It is among dozens of villages in the region. So, what has made Topa Pir such a focus of Indian state investment? Why would the Indian Army spend substantial time, effort, and money to implement humanitarian and development projects in this village? To answer this question, consider first the history of Operation Sadbhavana, the military program under which these efforts were undertaken.

The History of Operation Sadbhavana

The territory of the former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir is occupied in part by India (i.e., IAJK), in part by Pakistan (i.e., PAJK), and in part by China (i.e., Aksai Chin

Post from the White Knight Corps' X account highlighting Sadbhavana projects in Topa Pir.

and the Shaksgam Valley).[15] It is relevant to note that the Government of India (GoI) claims the entire territory of the former Princely State[16] is India. Since the 1947 partition of British India into India and Pakistan, the two countries have waged a constant, low-intensity conflict and several

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articleshow/114718183.cms?from=mdr.

11 "Meet Indian Army's White Knight Corps Which Gunned down Three Terrorists."

12 Akash Sharma, "'Unlike Politicians' Empty Promises': Adopted by Army, J&K's Topa Pir Village Seeing Remarkable Transformation." News18, September 22, 2024. https://www.news18.com/india/unlike-politicians-empty-promises-adopted-by-army-jks-topa-pir-village-seeing-remarkable-transformation-9059084.html.

13 Sharma, "'Unlike Politicians' Empty Promises': Adopted by Army, J&K's Topa Pir Village Seeing Remarkable Transformation."

14 Ibid.

15 Chitralekha Zutshi, "India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Issue: 1947 and Beyond," Association for Asian Studies, Asian Intercultural Contacts, 14, no. 2 (2009): 8; Mona Bhan, Haley Duschinski, And Ather Zia, "Introduction. 'Rebels of the Streets:' Violence, Protest, and Freedom in Kashmir," in Resisting Occupation in Kashmir, ed. Haley Duschinski et al. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 9, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16t6dpm.3.

16 This refers to the entire region of what was formerly called the "Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir," including all areas occupied by India, Pakistan, and China, and all areas contested between these countries.

outright wars over Jammu and Kashmir. In 1999, India and Pakistan waged their fourth outright war over the region, known as the Kargil War, which lasted from May to July.[17] Notably, Kargil is a city in IAJK located near the Line of Control.[18] As the war progressed, Indian authorities began to fear that "anti-nationalist sentiments or subversive tendencies" had spread over the de facto border, viewing Kargilis as "potential supporters of Pakistani-backed insurgents during the 1999 war."[19] Post-war Kargil soon became a counterinsurgency target of the Indian Army—however, their counterinsurgency tactics in Kargil were drastically different from the violent approaches taken in the Kashmir Valley.[20]

Map of the region of Jammu and Kashmir, 2019.[21]

In 2002, the GoI adopted a new "healing touch" policy, which claimed to use methods of compassion in order to heal "moral and historical wounds" and "promote a culture of goodwill and reconciliation in the region and rebuild a distraught civil society."[22] So, rather than methods of indiscriminate violence that had been used in the Kashmir Valley since 1989, the GoI focused on "winning the hearts and minds" of the Kargili people through "humanitarian" and "development" programs.[23] This military strategy, launched to combat the contagion of "anti-nationalist sentiment," is called Operation Sadbhavana, or Operation Goodwill.

"Hearts and minds" counterinsurgency operations are not unique to the Indian military. Especially since the September 11, 2001 attacks, the U.S. government has integrated "winning hearts and minds" (WHAM) strategies into its national security agenda on the understanding that "development assistance is an important 'soft power' tool to win consent for the presence of foreign troops in potentially hostile areas, and to promote stabilization and security objectives."[24] WHAM strategies have been used by several militaries, including by the British during the Malayan Emergency, by the U.S. in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and by the Philippines throughout many internal conflicts, such as the Huk Rebellion.[25] In the case of India's military in IAJK, the belief was that the WHAM approach could build trust between the people and the military, and in return, would diminish pro-azadi (self-

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17 Mona Bhan, "Counterinsurgency, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity in India: From Warfare to Welfare," Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series, September 11, 2013, 1, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315889863.

18 Robert G. Wirsing, "War or Peace on the Line of Control?: The India-Pakistan Dispute over Kashmir Turns Fifty," Boundary and Territory Briefing (International Boundaries Research Unit, University of Durham, 1998), 3.

19 Bhan, "Counterinsurgency, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity in India: From Warfare to Welfare," 9.

20 Ibid, 6-10.

21 Bill Nelson, "Map of the region of Kashmir, 2019," in Resisting Disappearance: Military Occupation and Women's Activism in Kashmir, by Ather Zia, vol. First edition, Decolonizing Feminisms (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), xvii, https://uwapress.uw.edu/book/9780295744988/resisting-disappearance/.

22 Bhan, "Counterinsurgency, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity in India: From Warfare to Welfare," 5.

23 Asha Hans, "An Experiment in Transition from Military to Human Security," in The Gender Imperative: Human Security vs. State Security (Routledge, 2010), 394-95.

24 Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, "Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan" (Boston, MA: Feinstein International Center, January 2012), https://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/winning-hearts-and-minds-examing-the-relationship-between-aid-and-security-in-afghanistan/.

25 Hannah Gurman, ed., Hearts and Minds: A People's History of Counterinsurgency, New Press People's History (New York: The New Press, 2013), 304, https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.26193311.

Lt. Gen. Arjun Ray

Goodwill Schools,[29] vocational training centers for women,[30] coaching for entrance exams into Indian medical schools,[31] government-facilitated youth exchanges (boys and girls from IAJK visit Indian states),[32] job fairs for youth, sports training and competitions, solar power projects in rural areas, crafts courses, etc.[33]

Next, to critically examine Operation Sadbhavana —and its role in Topa Pir—consider the broader context of the GoI's involvement in IAJK over the last several decades.

India's Occupation of IAJK

IAJK is a territory that has been illegally occupied by India since 1947. IAJK is one of the most highly militarized regions in the world, subject to India's colonial domination, longstanding human rights violations, total and constant surveillance, no access to justice, and complete legalized impunity. India has waged war on the Kashmiri people to suppress their movement for democracy and human rights in IAJK, including their right to self-determination, and criminalized all forms of dissent through the threat and imposition of various forms of individual and collective punishment. Some of these include censorship,[34] widespread curfews/

determination or freedom) sentiment.[26] Although officially launched in 1998, Operation Sadbhavana was brought to Ladakh in 2002 by Lt. Gen. Arjun Ray, with the following stated objectives: "1. To wrest the initiative from the terrorists and 2. To reintegrate the population to the national mainstream".[27] To achieve this goal, the Indian military implemented "humanitarian" programs focused primarily on quality education, women's empowerment, health care, community development, and infrastructure improvement.[28] Some examples include the opening of over 66 Army

26 Hans, "An Experiment in Transition from Military to Human Security," 394-395.

27 Arpita Anant, "Counterinsurgency and 'Op Sadbhavana' in Jammu and Kashmir," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, no. 19 (January 1, 2011), 14-17, https://www.idsa.in/publisher/occasionalpaper/counterinsurgency-and-op-sadbhavana-in-jammu-and-kashmir.

28 Anant, "Counterinsurgency and 'Op Sadbhavana' in Jammu and Kashmir," 15.

29 Samreen Mushtaq, "The Myth of Empowerment: Gender, Conflict, and 'Development' in Kashmir," in Minorities and Populism – Critical Perspectives from South Asia and Europe, ed. Volker Kaul and Ananya Vajpeyi (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 277–86, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34098-8_19.

30 Hans, "An Experiment in Transition from Military to Human Security," 399.

31 Indo-Asian News Service, "Army Starts 2-Month NEET Coaching 'Kashmir Super 30 Medical,'" NDTV, June 12, 2018, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/army-starts-2-month-neet-coaching-kashmir-super-30-medical-1866391.

32 Peer Ghulam Nabi and Jingzhong Ye, "Of Militarisation, Counter-Insurgency and Land Grabs in Kashmir," Economic and Political Weekly 50, no. 46/47 (2015): 60.

33 Chinar Corps – Indian Army (@ChinarcorpsIA), X (formerly Twitter), https://x.com/ChinarcorpsIA.

34 "BRIEF: Indian Transnational Repression Targeting Kashmiris" (Kashmir Law and Justice Project, October 2023), https://www.kljp.org/articles/brief-indian-transnational-

lockdowns,[35] internet blackouts,[36] torture, rape, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, and extra-judicial killings.[37] Additionally, the GoI has falsely portrayed Kashmiri Muslims as violent terrorists being funded and supported by Pakistan, therefore claiming their war on the people of IAJK as "cross-border counter-terrorism" efforts. This narrative, used to demonize and dehumanize Kashmiri Muslims, has been continuously maintained through pervasive disinformation campaigns,[38] fake-encounter killings,[39] and severe forms of censorship.[40] Furthermore, through abusive laws such as the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA),[41] the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA),[42] and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA),[43] the GoI has imposed a permanent state of emergency in IAJK, legalizing extreme state violence and impunity for all crimes and violations committed by Indian forces. In its 2018 report on human rights in Kashmir, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights states that "impunity for human rights violations and lack of access to justice are key human rights challenges in the Indian state of Jammu

and Kashmir," and notes that abusive laws "have created structures that obstruct the normal course of law, impede accountability and jeopardize the right to remedy for victims of human rights violations."[44] The unequivocal abuse of power carried out by the GoI in an attempt to control the Kashmiri population truly cannot be overstated. A summary of this situation excerpted from Complete Injustice: The Indian Supreme Court and the misrule of law in Kashmir follows:

"As it relates to IAJK, and in particular its Kashmiri Muslim population, the Indian judiciary, led by its Supreme Court, has consistently, unabashedly and essentially without controversy legalized the violation of fundamental rights, including by the standards of its own constitution. India has imposed a permanent, longstanding emergency in IAJK.

India has annexed and colonized IAJK. India is responsible for atrocity crimes (both war crimes and crimes against humanity) in IAJK. All of this has been legalized by the Indian judiciary and its Supreme Court. None of it has been recognized for what it is, or even that it is illegal and discriminatory, in India or internationally."[45]

To justify these crimes, the GoI presents them as counter-terrorism operations, facilitating a lack of meaningful engagement both by Indian and broader global institutions, who view the situation in IAJK as mere "collateral damage"[46] in an otherwise legitimate exercise

repression-targeting-kashmiris.

35 Kelly Buchanan, "FALQs: Article 370 and the Removal of Jammu and Kashmir's Special Status," webpage, The Library of Congress (blog), October 3, 2019, https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2019/10/falqs-article-370-and-the-removal-of-jammu-and-kashmirs-special-status/.

36 "The Impact of Internet Shutdowns on Human Rights Defenders in India" (American Bar Association Center for Human Rights, July 2022), https://www.americanbar.org/groups/human_rights/reports/india-internet-shutdowns/.

37 "Structures of Violence: The Indian State in Jammu and Kashmir" (Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, September 2015), https://jkccs.info/structures-of-violence-the-indian-state-in-jammu-and-kashmir/.

38 "BRIEF: Indian Disinformation Tactics Regarding Indian-Administered Kashmir" (Kashmir Law and Justice Project, October 2023), https://www.kljp.org/articles/brief-indian-disinformation-tactics-regarding-indian-administered-kashmir.

39 Angana P. Chatterji et al., "Buried Evidence: Unknown, Unmarked, and Mass Graves in Indian-Administered Kashmir," (International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-administered Kashmir, November 2009), https://www.kashmirprocess.org/reports/graves/01Front.html.

40 "BRIEF: Indian Transnational Repression Targeting Kashmiris."

41 "A 'Lawless Law': Detentions under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act" (Amnesty International, March 21, 2011), https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA20/001/2011/en/.

42 "'Misused, Abused': India's Harsh Terror Law under Rare Scrutiny," Al Jazeera, August 16, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/16/india-uapa-terror-law-scrutiny.

43 Saqib Wani, "The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA): Legal Impunity to Kill," The Public Sphere: Journal of Public Policy 10, no. 1 (2022): 183.

44 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan (Geneva: United Nations, 2018), 4-5, https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/report-situation-human-rights-kashmir-developments-indian-state-jammu-and-kashmir.

45 "Complete Injustice: The Indian Supreme Court and the Misrule of Law in Kashmir" (Kashmir Law and Justice Project, November 2023), 17, https://www.kljp.org/articles/complete-injustice-the-indian-supreme-court-and-the-misrule-of-law-in-kashmir.

46 Chatterji, "The Militarized Zone."

of state power. For example, a 2017 Pew Research Center survey showed that 60% of Indians approve of the approach that Modi has taken towards Kashmir.[47] At the same time, there has been very little international response to the violations in IAJK, and no substantive redress.[48]

Operation Sadbhavana plays an important role in promoting the Indian military's objectives in IAJK. In order to continue justifying human rights abuses, the GoI needs the public to perceive their actions as inherently good. The façade of "goodwill" promotes the illusion that they are protecting Kashmiris from a "threat" rather than targeting Kashmiris. Further, the GoI seeks to normalize its occupation, colonization and repression in IAJK. As Ahuja et al., write, "[C]ompassion can be a strategy to contain political dissension, regulate citizenship, and normalize extensive militarization."[49] Who really benefits from the Indian Army's "goodwill" in IAJK? Can a colonial power really provide humanitarian assistance to the people it dominates, exploits and denies rights to?

Goodwill or Bad Faith?

Consider one of Operation Sadbhavana's most "successful" and widespread initiatives—Army Goodwill Schools. As a result of India's longstanding occupation in IAJK, access to education has been a major challenge for the local population. For decades, students have faced numerous barriers to obtaining an education—many of which have been exacerbated since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, which brought state-wide

lockdowns and severely restricted internet access.[50] One such barrier is physical damage to schools as a result of state violence, shutting many down and forcing students to relocate to other schools in less dangerous areas, resulting in overcrowding.[51] Another barrier is censorship. Indian authorities have intensified their crackdown on dissent and protests generally, and student-led protests particularly, often forcing schools to temporarily close.[52] Additionally, as of February of 2024, only 30% of schools in IAJK had internet connection.[53] Frequent school closures, restricted internet access and generally poor conditions in schools and have resulted in an overall decrease in access to quality education. In 2024, around 4,500 public schools in IAJK were closed because they had little to no enrollment.[54]

Notably, women's and girls' access to education has been severely impacted by state violence in IAJK. As women and girls are primary targets of sexual violence and abuse by Indian state forces, schools' proximity to military camps often leads families to keep their daughters at home and otherwise restrict their movement.[55] Moreover, economic insecurity caused by the ongoing occupation has forced many rural Kashmiri families to prioritize certain children's education over others, often resulting in them choosing to invest in their sons' educations over their daughters'.[56] As a result, there is a

47 Hanyu Chwe, "How People in India See Pakistan, 70 Years after Partition," Pew Research Center (blog), accessed July 5, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/12/07/how-people-in-india-see-pakistan-70-years-after-partition/.

48 Chatterji, "The Militarized Zone."

49 Kanika Ahuja et al., "Identities in Conflict: A Comparison of Drawings of Muslim Adolescents in Kashmir and Delhi," SAGE Open 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 8, https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015623596.

50 P.A. Ahmad and S. Balamurgan, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Eucation in Kashmir," Vidyabharati International Interdisciplinary Research Journal 12, no. 2 (June 2021): 618.

51 Ahmad and Balamurgan, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Eucation in Kashmir," 617.

52 Ibid.

53 Riyaz Bhat, "Year-Ender: Expansion, Loopholes of Schools, Higher Education in 2024," Kashmir News Observer, December 31, 2024, https://www.kashmirnewsobserver.com/top-stories/year-ender-expansion-loopholes-of-school-higher-education-in-2024-kno-191367.

54 Syed Rizwan Geelani, "Union Education Ministry Points out Loopholes in J&K's Education Sector," Greater Kashmir, June 2, 2025, https://www.greaterkashmir.com/kashmir/union-education-ministry-points-out-loopholes-in-jks-education-sector/.

55 Ahmad and Balamurgan, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Eucation in Kashmir," 617.

56 Showkat Bhat, Aashaq Bhat, and Dr Chinnathurai, "Educational Status of Women in Jammu and Kashmir with Special Reference to Rural Areas," International Journal of Indian Psychology 3, no. 4 (September 25, 2016): 180, https://doi.org/10.25215/0304.150.

Army Goodwill Public School Pahalgam, "Students and staff pose in front of the school building, Pahalgam (J&K)," Facebook, April 22, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16npdFGcG5/

significant gender gap in literacy rates, with the male literacy rate at 85.7% while the female literacy rate sits at 68%.[57]

While India's illegal occupation and militarization of, and violations with impunity in, IAJK have severely impacted access to education in the region, the Indian Army portrays itself through Operation Sadbhavana as the savior of education in Kashmir. For example, the Army Goodwill Schools' official website proclaims:

"Initiatives likes these are reassuring not only because of the positive numbers and results, but also because in these initiatives exists a possibility of socially uplifting a section of the society which not only suffers socioeconomically but also lives under a constant threat of geopolitical instability. Education is a tool that might prove to be very effective in encouraging social mobility."[58]

The socio-economic and geopolitical stability referenced here has been caused by India itself through its occupation and colonial domination of IAJK. The Indian Army is marketing its supposed solution to a problem that they themselves have created and sustained. Not only do these Goodwill Schools create the illusion that the Army is acting in good faith, but it also provides them with an opportunity to suppress pro-azadi sentiment expressed by the students while promoting a curriculum that is anti-freedom and supportive of the Indian state's agenda in IAJK. This is a clear example of how Operation Sadbhavana directly benefits the GoI's objectives, and contributes to the violation and denial of Kashmiris' rights. This is not goodwill—it is bad faith.

With this context, the pretense of adopting the village of Topa Pir as a form of state goodwill starts to crumble. As mentioned earlier, the Indian Army has historically used illegal methods such as arbitrary detention, torture and extra-judicial killings to target Kashmiris.

57 Dipanjolly Nath, "Literacy Rate in India 2022," International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research 5, no. 1 (January–February 2023): 5, https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i01.1409.

58 "Indian Army: Capacity Building Through Education in Jammu and Kashmir," Army Goodwill School, n.d., https://www.armygoodwillschool.in/.

Though there has been clear evidence of these human rights violations for decades, the GoI has continuously denied wrongdoing. So, when there was such a public case of arbitrary detention, custodial torture and extra-judicial killing as that in December 2023 in Topa Pir, it is no surprise that the GoI shifted the focus away from the Army's crimes and instead to their acts of "goodwill" to help the villagers. By implementing Sadbhavana programs in Topa Pir, the Indian Army further entrenches itself in that sub-region, embedding itself more deeply in daily life, increasing surveillance of and tightening control over the local populace. Ubiquitous monitoring—of movements, meetings, and even online presence—creates a pervasive climate of fear: people are forced to self-censor, avoid public gatherings, and are unable to criticize the authorities, knowing that a single remark can invite interrogation, arbitrary detention or violent reprisals. As Mona Bhan highlights in her research on armed social welfare deployed by the GoI in post-war Kargil, "The claims to 'heal' and 'repair' wounded hearts and souls enabled the state and the military to regulate and track not just physical bodies but also their intimate desires, allegiances, and attachments."[59] Declaring Topa Pir a "model village" under Operation Sadbhavana facilitates the state's repression of those who would seek accountability for the GoI's crimes or defend their fundamental rights, erasing the memory of violations and further disempowering the people. Any who would still risk limitless reprisals to seek accountability would now be easily painted as "anti-national" and "ungrateful," seeking only to "defame" India's virtuous military, likely because they are agents of "cross-border terrorists."

Topa Pir is just one small example within Operation Sadbhavana, emblematic of a larger system that suppresses the truth of the Indian military's crimes in IAJK. Operation Sadbhavana is not a campaign of goodwill—it is merely another form of domination and control over a population, ultimately serving to deny them their rights. It should be obvious that one cannot illegally occupy and colonize a land and commit grave human rights violations against its people, and then claim to be helping those same people through so-called "humanitarian and development" programs. Without an end to the illegal occupation of IAJK and accountability for the crimes and violations committed by the Indian state, no real development or humanitarian relief is possible in IAJK.

59 Mona Bhan, Counterinsurgency, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity in India (New York: Routledge, 2014), 10, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315889863.